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ABSTRACT

As part of the Goals Clarification topic of the 1975 Northeast Conference, a workshop entitled "The Non-Major Foreign Language Student" was presented. This article contains the workshop's most salient ideas, presented at a time when foreign-language study is in considerable jeopardy at all levels. Offerings are being limited, and highly qualified teachers are losing their positions. There are fewer students in most colleges and public schools. The mid-seventies represents a "students' market." In light of this situation, the following article suggests specific programs to help remedy our plight. The reader will find a number of suggestions for revamping the major. Courses are proposed for attracting students from the academic community as well as from the community at large. There are proposals for special courses to maintain language skills, to appeal to students' immediate needs and interests, and to provide career preparation. (Author)

Towards Higher Foreign-Language Enrollments at the College Level

As part of the Goals Clarification topic of the 1975 Northeast Conference we presented a workshop entitled "The Non-Major Foreign-Language Student." In the course of our sessions we attempted to suggest programs for attracting to the field of foreign-language students whose specialties and interests lie in other areas. This article contains the workshop's most salient ideas. Since we feel that a non-major program cannot really be separated from a good program for the major, we have outlined here several new or revised programs for students specializing in our field. We feel that an enriched curriculum can serve not only the college community but may also attract many highly motivated learners from the community at large. Experience has shown that the programs described in this paper have been successful in that they have attracted and retained students by providing enjoyable, profitable, and academically sound instruction.

The present period, unlike the early and mid-sixties, is hardly a propicious one for foreign-language teachers at any level. Seldom does a week pass when we do not hear of colleges limiting language offerings, when job seekers even with doctorates turn in desperation to totally unrelated fields, when communities in an attempt to economize, limit programs and release many fine, devoted teachers. Moreover, there are fewer students in most colleges and public school systems, and, to paraphrase an expression used by realtors, the mid-seventies represent a "students' market." This situation is borne out by the following statistics provided by the Modern Language Association:

College Language Enrollments, Fall, 1974

College level enrollments in foreign language courses appear to have fallen

by six percent between 1972 and 1974, according to a preliminary report on the Modern Language Association's 1974-75 survey of foreign language enrollments in U.S. colleges and universities. The report is based on a sample of 400 colleges (279 four-year institutions and 121 two-year colleges), representing approximately one-sixth of the total number of colleges offering one or more foreign language courses.

Tallies were taken of the 1970, 1972, and 1974 enrollments in French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, as well as figures representing total enrollment for all languages in each of the sample colleges. A comparison of 1970 and 1972 totals shows an overall drop in the sample group of-9.3%. During the same period, the total response group of 2,419 colleges (99% of the "universe" of colleges) experienced a decline of -9.2% in foreign language enrollments. The closeness of the two percentage figures suggests that the sample group closely reflects the total group from which it was drawn and thus provides a reasonable basis for projecting growth or decline during the period 1972-74.

During the two-year period ending in 1974 the sample group showed a loss of -6.0% in overall language enrollments. Among the languages, German showed the greatest decline (-12.6%), followed by French and Russian; Spanish and Italian showed slight increases. The accompanying table shows the enrollment tallies for the 400 sample colleges, with percent change figures for 1970-72 and 1972-74, and for comparison the percent change 1970-72 for the total 1972 response group of 2,419 institutions.

COLLEGE ENROLLMENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES, 1970-74, SAMPLE OF 400 COLLEGES

Language	Enrollment 1970	1972	1974	(% Change: Total*) (1970-72)	% Change: Sample 1970-72	1972-74
French	69,136	56,068	49,947	(-18.4%)	-18.9%	-10.9%
German	42,041	36,729	32,101	(-12.6%)	-12.6%	-12.6%
Italian	6,914	6,597	6,717	(- 2.7%)	- 4.6%	+1.8%
Russian	7,600	7,446	6,691	(+ 0.6%)	- 2.0%	-10.1%
Spanish	76,058	71,579	72,129	(- 6.3%)	- 5.9%	+0.8%
All Languages	218,948	198,520	186,520	(- 9.2%)	- 9.3%	- 6.0%

To be sure, these statistics are of interest to all of us, yet they reveal little that we have not known. Much time is being spent in making agonizing reappraisals of past practices and we have been clad in a sackcloth and ashes long enough. In an attempt to determine what is looked for in foreign-language instruction we queried several hundred students in the spring of 1975. Those questioned represented both a state and a private liberal arts college. Almost unanimously the replies indicated that the non-major foreign-language student wanted most to learn the language as a vehicle of communication. For them, language study was a practical device which could be utilized for both professional and recreational needs. These students stressed virtually in unison a very strong desire for a greater oral emphasis in class and with a practical vocabulary transferable to real-live situations.

As high on their list of desiderata was the request for courses with greater cultural content. With few exceptions students indicated that language learning was a source of personal satisfaction since it provided contact with a foreign culture. To a lesser degree they expressed an interest in studying more about the great cultural achievements of each country.

Walker[1] after a similar study states that 30% of the respondants to his questionnaire at the University of Texas indicated that their greatest concern was in the general area of classroom techniques. This study completely supports the conclusions of our own query. Students expressed a desire for more speaking practice. They were critical of audio-lingual techniques when this approach hindered and stifled free expression. More important than grammatical accuracy to them is an opportunity to converse on topics of real

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1. John L. Walker, "Opinions of University Students About Language Teaching," Foreign Language Annals, 7, (1973), 102-105.

interest. Moreover, they felt that the instructor himself should make every effort to use the target language.

Walker asked students to characterize the most successful foreign-language teacher. They rated highly the instructor who is interested in the students as individuals and tries to insure that they will learn and truly enjoy the learning process. Students seek the "inspiring" and "enthusiastic" teacher who is well prepared for class and who makes every effort to teach a "living" language. It is interesting to note that Walker reports a definite anti-Ph.D. bias on the part of these students. They generally felt that the "publish or perish policy" has not had a generally beneficial effect on classroom instruction.

Let us turn to some specific recommendations for revitalizing college language programs by considering several approaches to the program for the major.

Plan A Major This approach is the single language major which we have all known. This plan is still heavily oriented toward literature. However, as we conceive it, the Plan A should be broadened so as to permit the student to do additional work in art, music, linguistics or history of the target culture.

Plan B Major This can be referred to as the Modern Language Major whereby the student specializes in the language and culture of TWO countries. This approach responds to the interests of those students who wish a general grasp and more practical applications of several languages. Alden[1] notes that we are in a "period of Pragmatism," when students, who find language practical, call for more of it at the expense of literature. Alden

1. Douglas W. Alden, "The Status of French," French Review, XLVIII, 1974, 7-15.

recognizes, as do undoubtedly many in our profession, that a language major virtually by definition provided a predominately literary orientation. The Plan B major is essentially a reaction against what Alden refers to as the "pragmatist elite" practice of the past, since this plan emphasizes the study of language over literature, and permits the students to establish cultural relations between the countries of the two languages studied.

Plan C Major This may be referred to as an Area Studies Major and is an attempt to respond as much as possible to the variety of student interests. It is a reflection of the thinking expressed by Rivers[1].

This program is designed to acquaint students with the target culture through a study of the various media by which a society expresses its values. It is flexible enough to allow students to do, (using a French major here for the purpose of illustration) an area study of Canada, or of Black African and Arabic countries in which France and its culture have had a dominant role. Such flexibility may permit us to meet the needs of our third world students desirous of learning more about their heritage. A student working under this plan gains a knowledge about the unique characteristics of the target culture, its historical development, its artistic contributions and value structure. Students in this program may opt to study the culture of a country in a broad sense or to specialize in a particular area. For example, in a French area studies program a student may choose to concentrate on French culture in general or to focus on such specialized areas as French Romanticism or French Renaissance studies. They are required to write a thesis or "major paper" which links at least three fields studied, i.e. following the above example, a student of French Romanticism may write on Romanticism in art, music, and literature.

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1. Wilga M. Rivers, "The Non-Major: Tailoring the Course to the Person, Not the Image," ADFL Bulletin, 5, (1973), 12-18.

This major will establish closer ties between the language department and other departments such as History, Art, Music, Political Science, etc., and as such may serve to diminish the isolation in which language departments too often find themselves.

An important component of such "major" programs and indeed of any language program is the provision for encouraging students to spend one semester or one academic year in a recognized foreign studies program offered in the country of the target language. Such an overseas experience serves as a living extension of the language-culture program, making it a living and lived experience for the student. Alden believes that he could establish a correlation between successful departments and those which offer such programs.

We strongly suggest that institutions faced with dwindling enrollments in languages consider the feasibility of creating new and varied majors. This, of course, entails extending ourselves into new fields. The results, however, could be impressive. Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, reports, for example, a dramatic increase in language enrollments as the direct result of their attempt to tailor the courses to the interests and future plans of their students who see a more direct relation between their area-study centered major and their projected careers, be they in international business, diplomacy, or editorial work.

The three-track major at Trinity has, moreover, enabled the department not only to serve the language majors, but also to offer a variety of different courses which reflect the needs and interests of a much larger pool of students who are non-majors. A course in Italian cinema, for example, is applicable to all three majors and also draws a large number of non-majors interested in learning about Italy's contribution to the history and growth

of cinema. A French civilization course satisfies the requirement of Plan A, B, or C Majors and also attracts non-majors interested in European history, art, music, architecture, and political science.

Yet the answer to the question of how one attracts a larger pool of students is not to be found only in the variety of different courses offered: one must consider also broadening the scope of the course itself. We must state at the start that such broadening, designed to serve more of the student community, requires that certain sections be taught in English, and that some of the readings also be available in that language for those students who do not have a reading knowledge of the foreign language. One institution offered a course entitled Existentialism and French Literature. This entailed a study of the history of existentialism both as a philosophical and literary movement. Certain treatises of Satre and Camus were presented by the instructor and students read a number of works by these authors as well as by others associated with the movement. An analysis of enrollments indicated that such a course attracted philosophy and literature majors as well. Likewise a very successful course on Seventeenth Century France, one exploring not only literature ahd philosophy, but also the plastic arts succeeded in attracting students of art, literature, and history.

Among our recommendations we have mentioned varied approaches to majors, as well as some culture oriented courses to attract a broader selection of the student community. A third suggestion can be placed under the heading of Special Programs; this consists of courses not offered on a regular yearly basis, but made available from time to time with the idea of serving much broader groups and taught frequently on a team basis.

A course on the great masterpieces of European literature or on Surrealism, for example, may represent a joint effort on the part of a number of language professors. Such a course would attract students from a number of fields such as English, Comparative Literature, or simply students seeking a broader liberal arts education. Special programs sponsored by the language department and another department can also prove effective. One institution reports a successful program sponsored by the French and Philosophy Departments which entails the study of French literature and philosophy. A similar program between the Spanish and Art Departments offers the opportunity for a semester in Spain whereby the literature, language and the art are studied sur place.

As an outgrowth of the Special Program we further suggest a series of adult education courses. Like the programs described above, these too are broad in scope and will most likely be taught in English with the readings either in English or in the foreign language. These courses attract older members of the community, or members of a particular ethnic group, anxious to continue the learning process or to deepen their knowledge of their cultural heritage.

We feel that a truly successful department is one which broadens its offerings, one which puts forth every possible effort to make language study a lived experience for its students. This is certainly the case with the departments who send students abroad. In economically troubled times, however, it may become increasingly more difficult for students to participate in foreign study programs. Nevertheless, we must do everything possible to attract and to keep students by making language study a lived experience at the home institution. This can be done through language tables, language cocktail parties, foreign film series, radio shows, language hours, or, on a

more modest basis, by making language lounges available.

Foreign language non-majors have also expressed a desire to maintain the skills begun in high school language study and, as a result, college departments are finding it necessary to design courses inviting to students at any level of linguistic preparation. Many of these offerings have to be virtually individualized in nature. Grittner[1] cites the maintenance-of-skills programs as one of the most recent attempts at a solution to attrition. He specifically had in mind courses at the high school level, but we feel that his advice is equally, if not even more applicable to colleges. Such a program, he states, might be defined as including "all activities which are designed to maintain or to improve the students' language skills during those years in senior high school when regular foreign language courses are no longer available." We feel that such programs are feasible and necessary at our level as well. They represent an important means of salvaging those who might well let their language study lapse.

We conceive such maintenance-of-skills courses as follows:

1. An intermediate course basically conversational and cultural in nature designed to keep alive students' previous skills.

2. A course to expand reading skills offering topics of particular interest to students. These topics may relate to a number of fields.

3. A course basically designed to encourage students who have derived satisfaction from language study but who possess backgrounds traditionally considered too weak to continue their study in college. The prerequisite may be two years of high school or an equivalent preparation and may be indicated as a refresher course on the structure and sound system of the language. Although such a course would likely not apply toward a major or minor requirement, it would encourage students to continue language study in the regular offerings of the department.

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1. Frank M. Grittner, "A Focus Report: Maintaining Foreign Language Skills for the Advanced-Course Dropout," Foreign Language Annals, 2, (1968), 205-211.

4. Individualized or independant study programs. Such study should be encouraged even if it may mean over-extension on the part of faculty members. We see such courses as meeting perhaps only one or two times per week with students working independantly and conferring periodically with the instructor. Such independant study courses would be as follows: poetry, artistic translation, journalism (reading foreign newspapers), specific career orientated courses, etc.

During the past several years a great deal of attention has been given to career education. Certainly the college foreign language department cannot neglect this important concept in the years to come. A number of colleges have embarked on a serious selling campaign in which foreign language study is linked to the practical problem of future employment. Northwest Missouri State University has prepared a booklet "What and How for F. L. Students" which describes many career opportunities involving language skills. A similar brochure was made available at pre-registration time for all students at Central Connecticut State College. Entitled Language Study at Central Connecticut State College, the document attempts to relate languages to careers in Law, Communications and Media, Health, Travel and Tourism, Library Science, Government, Fashion and Gastronomy, Education, Social Work, Business, and Commerce.

These institutions are facing the truth that languages are, in and of themselves, no longer a career preparation except for a very few students who can and should go into teaching. Even for them, language is no longer enough. We must realize that at the present time language is playing a supportive role. One needs to have real competence in some other field where language may become a valuable tool and a valid career enhancement. For too long we have been guilty of "oversell" in relating a foreign language major to direct career opportunities. This is particularly true in the field of translating, since almost all translation will involve

technical areas. There are very few capable of making a living at literary translation, an art and a skill rare indeed and more often than not one requiring an established reputation. It is imperative that particularly honest and good counseling be provided for the areas of translation and interpreting, and indeed for all career areas, in order to remove a great many false impressions created by overly fervent language teachers throughout the years.

The effect of career emphasis has been significant on most language departments. It requires much greater teacher flexibility, a willingness to expand our own competencies and a need for the constant development of new career-related materials. It is perhaps a cruel truth, but none the less a very real one, that ours does not seem to be a period of deep humanistic commitment in the artistic, belletristique sense. Yet we have been too inflexible in our format and demands, not willing to take into account individual interests and individual differences in the most effective learning modalities. We have insisted on lock-step pacing. Of course correcting this situation will require a great deal of work on our part, but too much work for a while is better than no work at all. Among other things, this means that the teacher will have to show a willingness to develop himself, to learn something new. The goals and programs outlined and discussed in this paper will require many hours of consideration, hard work, intensive study. A profession which had become somewhat complacent and limited in scope, must no longer hesitate to move forward with an attitude of confidance, imagination, and enthusiasm as if its very survival depends on it, for indeed it does.

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